

Meet the former Commercial Appeal reporter who's now in Congress

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Election Day in Shelby County - Nov. 6, 2018



(Photo: CRAIG LASSIG, EPA-EFE)
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When Angie Craig worked in Memphis journalism, she asked questions about real estate developments in Olive Branch, budget cuts at Shelby County Schools, billboard bans on Highway 61, and on and on.

You know, newspaper stuff.

But this week, speaking on the phone to an old colleague (I would say "former," but since that colleague was me, "old" also works), Craig had a very different question:

"You mean I may be the first Commercial Appeal reporter to serve in the United States Congress?"

Hmmm... Could be!

Tuesday, Angie Craig — product of a rural Arkansas trailer court, former editor of The Daily Helmsman at the University of Memphis, former reporter with The Commercial Appeal — was elected to Congress in Minnesota.

More specifically, she was among the 30 Democratic candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives who flipped a district held by a Republican.



Is this the first former reporter with The Commercial Appeal to be elected to Congress? Meet Angie Craig. *(Photo: Angie Craig For Congress)*

"I also won a district that Trump won in 2016," she said. "This district leans Republican. A Democrat has only held this seat twice since the 1940s."

In the process of winning an election, Craig established several firsts, in addition to "first Commercial Appeal reporter to serve in the United States Congress" (a milestone that is hard to certify, considering the age of this newspaper and the hundreds of reporters who have slouched through its doors).

She is likely the first Minnesota member of Congress with a Southern accent. ("You grow up in Arkansas, you can't get it out of you," she said. "Apparently, Minnesotans like it.")

She is the first Minnesota member of Congress to be endorsed by Samuel L. Jackson. (The movie actor appears in a humorous video for Craig, created by a political action group, Swing Left. Celebrity videos promoting progressive causes have become

something of a trend lately: see also the local videos with [Jennifer Lawrence](#) and [Ed Helms](#), in opposition to [City Council referenda](#).)

More important, Craig is "the first openly lesbian mother to be elected to Congress, and the first openly gay person elected to Congress from Minnesota," according to her Wikipedia biography. (Apparently, when you get elected to Congress, you get a Wikipedia biography.)

After all those firsts, here's some seconds: Tuesday's vote represented Craig's second attempt to be elected to Minnesota's 2nd Congressional District.

In 2016, when the seat became open thanks to the retirement of the Republican incumbent, Craig lost to conservative Republican Jason Lewis in the general election. She lost by 7,724 votes; but the third candidate in the race, an independent, collected 28,500 votes, so Craig had no reason to be discouraged.

She wasn't. Tuesday, Craig received 177,971 votes, while Lewis earned 159,373 — or, 12,972 votes fewer than he collected in 2016. There was no third-party candidate in the district, which extends from the southern edge of St. Paul, Minnesota, into farmland.

Craig, 46, was born in West Helena, Arkansas, but spent most of her childhood in trailer homes in Gosnell and Jonesboro, where she was a graduate of Nettleton High School.

Moving across the river to the big city, she earned a journalism degree and served as editor of the campus newspaper, The Daily Helmsman, at what was then known as Memphis State University. (She credits former journalism professor Elinor Grusin with being a key mentor.)

In total, Craig spent 11 years in Memphis, working for much of that time as an intern, part-time reporter and finally full-time newshound at The Commercial Appeal. Her beats included DeSoto County and the Memphis and Shelby County school systems, before they consolidated.

"I spend plenty of time driving around DeSoto County, just getting to know characters and writing about them," she said. "And that's pretty much what I did running for Congress. I met people and tried to listen to them."



Angie Craig meets fans and soon-to-be constituents in Minnesota. (Photo: Angie Craig For Congress)

Craig left the newspaper to take a job in communications and public affairs with the Memphis division of the medical technology company, Smith & Nephew. That led to similar jobs that took her to London, and, finally, in 2005, to St. Paul, where Craig worked in corporate relations for St. Jude Medical (no relation to the Memphis children's hospital).

Soon, she'll be a full-time member of Congress — "a social progressive and a fiscal moderate," she said, but one with Mid-South roots. (Her father and stepmother, Roger and Brenda Craig, now live in Bartlett.)

"On the stump, I talk about growing up in a mobile home court in Arkansas," Craig said. "I talk about working a couple of jobs to help put myself through a state college." She said her personal life wasn't an issue or a controversy. "Minnesota is very open and accepting," said Craig, who has raised four children with wife Cheryl Greene.

In any case, Congress could use innovative ideas, and Craig clearly is an innovator. In a 1993 story in *The Commercial Appeal*, while covering an event at Club Obsession on East Brooks Road, she even innovated her own past tense of a verb when she wrote that "a young Elvis Presley impersonator from Massachusetts shooked, rattled and rolled" his

way to victory. The grammar may not have been precise, but the music of the famous phrase remained intact.